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OPENING STATEMENT

Hearing on United States Policy Towards Indonesia
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Chairman, Committee on Foreign Relations
February 27, 1992

This afternoon the Committee on Foreign Relations convenes to consider American policy towards Indonesia following last November's massacre of East Timorese by Indonesian soldiers.

At that time Indonesian President Suharto characterized the massacre as a "small matter" that had been "exaggerated by Western countries and their press." More recently, President Suharto stated that international criticism of Indonesia amounted to a violation of Indonesia's human rights.

I wish to assure the Government of Indonesia today that the situation in East Timor is neither a small matter, nor one exaggerated by the West. Nor do I believe criticism of the massacre of civilians is a violation of Indonesia's national rights.

Let us be clear, Indonesia's occupation of East Timor is illegal. Indonesia's invasion of East Timor in 1975 is just as illegal as Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. Just as illegal as China's invasion of Tibet. It would be just as illegal if tomorrow Russia invaded the Ukraine. The United Nations does not recognize Indonesia's occupation of East Timor, nor does the United States.

Nor should we ever recognize it unless the East Timorese declare in a United Nations supervised referendum their wish to be Indonesian.

Somehow, I do not believe that today that would be their freely expressed wish.

Not when the Indonesian Attorney General announced this month that the government would try thirteen civilians for subversion, four of whom face the death penalty if convicted, while so far six Indonesian soldiers court-martialed for last November's atrocity only face dismissal from active duty.

Not when the newly-appointed military commander of East Timor states that "the incident might reflect the people's aspirations, but it was a rebellion" and swears he will not be "as patient" as the last commander in dealing with unrest.

Not when the Indonesian-appointed governor of East Timor accuses right-wing extremists backed by the Indonesian military of inciting last November's attack and threatening his life.

Not when the Indonesian military says there are less than 150 hard-core East Timorese rebels left but it still takes more than 10,000 Indonesian troops and security personnel to pacify the province.

Not when a Timorese Catholic priest declares, "yes, we get the roads, schools and clinics, but what comes with them? Oppression, violence, and abuse. Is it any wonder many don't love the Indonesians?"

This is an issue many would like to ignore. Certainly, the Indonesians wish it were so. They've just banned all foreign journalists from East Timor. Even some in the Administration would prefer quiet diplomacy. We saw last November what seventeen years of quiet diplomacy have accomplished.

When the cries of an oppressed people are heard, the whole world must shout their cause whether in Kuwait, Tibet, Burma, or East Timor.

This afternoon we will hear from a panel of private witnesses. They include Geoffrey Robinson of Amnesty International; Sidney Jones of Asia Watch - recently returned from East Timor; Allan Nairn, a journalist who was an eyewitness to the November attack and was himself beaten by Indonesian troops; and Bishop Paul Moore, who has also been to East Timor.